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LETTER DATED 23 FEBRUARY 1994 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF CROATIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

In accordance with instructions from my Government, I wish to express Croatia's utmost concern about two serious developments on the territory of the Republic of Croatia that are in violation of the Security Council resolutions, and in particular resolution 871 (1993).

As it is already known, on 18 February 1994, at 0900 hours, approximately 100 Serbian paramilitary troops advanced towards the NEPBAT positions at a crossing-point at the bridge over the Sava River, on the international border between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The NEPBAT troops then relinquished their positions faced with overwhelming and hostile units, thus giving the Serbian paramilitaries effective control of the crossing-point. The Croatian Government has had reports that in the immediate vicinity of the bridge, on the Bosnian side, Serbian paramilitary units have been joined by elements of the Yugoslav paratroopers. That raises our concerns with regard to the security of the civilian population and the forces of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in the Sector West, and with regard to the control of the international border of Croatia in accordance with resolution 769 (1992). Further, this hostile act puts in serious jeopardy the confidence-building measures and the restoration of traffic along the Zagreb-Zupanja highway, as envisioned in resolution 871 (1993).

My Government would like to commend the efforts of UNPROFOR in its attempts to regain control of the bridge by means of negotiation. In our view, the present situation is unacceptable and should be resolved urgently. My Government is strongly of the opinion that the aggression against Croatian territory and the blatant disregard for UNPROFOR forces in Sector West would warrant stronger action and the use of force, if the negotiations prove ineffective due to Serbian obstruction.

The situation on the territory of the Republic of Croatia immediately adjacent to Sector South is equally tense and is also disturbing. Yesterday, 22 February 1994, in the early afternoon Serbian insurgents from their positions in and around Krusevo (United Nations Protected Area (UNPA) South) initiated an artillery attack on the pontoon bridge over the Maslenica Straits, causing human casualties and material damage to the bridge and the surrounding facilities.

According to the United Nations Senior Military Observer who inspected the site, beginning at 1325 hours a total of 24 shells impacted in the area of the bridge, one of which caused minor damage to the bridge itself. One military reservist manning the checkpoint at the bridge was seriously injured, as well as two civilian travellers crossing the bridge at the time of attack. It is assessed that the artillery used was 105 mm, 122 mm and 155 mm calibre.

Today, 23 February 1994, the Serbian insurgents began the shelling of the area of the Maslenica bridge from Krusevo at 0830 hours, sporadically continuing their attack until 1420 hours. In that time impacts of 17 shells were recorded, causing minor material damage and injuring a driver of a truck transporting humanitarian supplies. In addition to this, on several occasions, the Croatian Army observers have recorded a fly-over of the area by the "Galeb" and "MiG-21" military jet aircraft of the Yugoslav Air Force, from the area of Benkovac, over Krusevo and onwards in the direction of Lika, in an apparent reconnaissance mission.

Needless to say, the civilian and humanitarian traffic over the bridge has been interrupted, thus disrupting the supply of basic necessities to the Dalmatia region of Croatia and to southern and central Bosnia and Herzegovina. Human casualties and material damage have raised tension in the area that could lead to further undesired developments. The Security Council is fully aware of the importance that the Republic of Croatia attaches to free and unimpeded traffic over the Maslenica Straits and has on several occasions reiterated its commitment to the free flow of traffic.

These two evolving situations bring serious concerns to the Government of the Republic of Croatia. We urge the Security Council to send a clear message to the Serbian paramilitary units and insurgents that the actions described shall not be tolerated and should be terminated immediately. The Council should emphasize that it is ready to use all measures at its disposal in order to ensure compliance with its previous decisions concerning the territorial integrity and international borders of the Republic of Croatia, bearing in mind that recent Serbian insurgent actions are seriously jeopardizing the overall peace process in the region as a whole.

I would kindly request your assistance in distributing this letter as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Mario NOBILO
Ambassador
Permanent Representative